

Dear Students,

The College leadership, including the Presidents, the ASCI President, the Faculty President & President-elect, and the senior administrative cabinet, has been working diligently over past weeks to monitor developments related to the spread of COVID-19 (coronavirus). You should by now have received information from various offices related to this issue, including recommendations for steps to be taken to ensure your health and welfare.

I am writing at this moment to convey the latest developments regarding class meetings. As you may know, a number of institutions across the country have moved to online class sessions only; in particular, colleges and universities in areas of significant outbreak have taken this step (e.g., Seattle area, NYC, etc.). To date, no cases of COVID-19 have yet been identified in the state of Idaho, although we understand that occurrence is almost inevitable. We have established decision-points at which a full range of possible actions will likely be taken, including a moratorium on sponsored travel, suspension of events, voluntary quarantine of exposed students in selected campus residential facilities—and, to the point of this note, cessation of in-person class meetings.

I hasten to add that we are not there yet: The best information available indicates that the risk to our community does not yet require us to avoid meeting IRL—that is, in classes, in person. However, we recognize that we cannot anticipate in advance all the challenges and complications involved with moving to online class meetings. Thus, wisdom dictates that we should test the process, learn what we may about the unexpected, and make adjustments prior to moving online all at once should that become necessary. Accordingly, I have requested that all faculty members select one session next week, March 16-20, to go online in each course they teach. Your professors will be communicating to you which class session and how they will handle the online transition shortly. Afterward, I will provide a means for you to give us feedback regarding your sense of the successes, challenges, and lessons learned from this test drive. This information will be shared with the faculty at large, IT, and other relevant offices so that we can make any needed changes going forward.

So that you are fully informed, here are some of the conclusions reached and considerations taken into account regarding a possible shift to online classes thus far:

**Synchronicity:** In general, online courses can either occur in real time, synchronously, so that students and faculty all meet at once, or asynchronously on demand, so that students access course content more or less when they wish to do so at any hour of the day or night. For our purposes in response to the current exigency, classes will be held “live” rather than proctored in an asynchronous manner. This means that instructors will hold their online sessions during the same time and day as originally scheduled, just in an online medium (remember, they’ll tell you which sessions).

**Technology:** Two platforms already in use at the College will be utilized for this trial run with online instruction: Canvas, the College Learning Management System (LMS), will continue to serve as the primary site for syllabi, schedules, curriculum, announcements, grade book functions, and course content. Teams is the Microsoft 365 unified communication and collaboration platform designed to support chats and video meetings. Our IT Office will be issuing instructions about how to access and utilize these functions for those new to the interface shortly.

Course Adjustments: Moving to a digital class meeting will involve more than technology. It will likely require adjustments to the manner in which your professors proctor your curriculum. For example, group discussion, while still possible online, will likely be quite different than face-to-face contexts. Other activity-oriented sessions, such as labs or performances, may be impossible to reproduce in an online context. Examinations designed to be taken in a controlled group setting may require transition to a take-home structure, etc. Please be patient as your professors work out how to adjust their course content.

Communication: The known and unknown aspects of this situation—risk factors, rate of spread, concerns for family, implications for grades, and more—have increased stress and anxiety levels throughout our community. We hope to alleviate some measure of this increase through effective communication, transparency of decision making, and good reasoning for actions taken. In addition to email updates, we are increasing web-based communication to various groups in our community and have already established daily meetings with many campus leaders to review new developments and coordinate responses. We seek your input regarding every aspect of our institutional response. The intellectual capital represented by the Yote community—our collective ability to reflect, to analyze, to problem-solve, and to act decisively—is among our most valued assets and should be engaged to the greatest extent possible now. To that point, please feel free to contact ASCI President Blake Cowman, VP Paul Bennion, or me regarding any questions, ideas, or feedback you have at any time.

Respectfully,

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